Asia's football chief says winter scheduling for 2034 World Cup will be ideal

By Umaid Wasim

INTERVIEW

THERE remains a strong possibility that, just like the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the 2034 edition in Saudi Arabia will be played during the cooler winter months instead of the traditional summer slot. Although it hasn't been finalised yet, the idea has the backing of Asia's football leader Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

FIFA confirmed at the end of last year that Saudis will fulfil their long-standing ambition of hosting football's showpiece tournament after an unopposed bid and become the second country in the Arabian peninsula to host a World Cup after Qatar. The World Cup in Qatar was the first to be held in November-December to avoid the searing desert heat of the summer and Sheikh Salman, the Asian Football Confederation president, wants the Saudis to do the same.

"I don't see it any other way but there is still a long way to 2034 and I think it depends on FIFA and the confederations to decide," Sheikh Salman, who is also FIFA's senior vice-president, told Dawn in an interview during his three-day visit to Pakistan as a state guest.

"The time will come for them to decide but I think I agree why the World Cup should not only be in the summer," he added. "Like even in the United States [the joint-hosts of the 2026 FIFA World Cup alongside Canada and Mexico] in the summer, it's too hot in some cities and if you want to play in the afternoon, it is very difficult for the players."

Sheikh Salman pointed out that despite the winter scheduling of the World Cup resulting in a tweak in the calendar, it sees peak performance levels from the players who are midway into the season, especially those playing in European leagues.

"People will dispute [the timing] that it will interrupt the calendar but you know when you have players coming in after some months into the season, you can see the difference on the pitch," he said, referring to performances by Argentina's totemic forward Lionel Messi who guided his country to long-awaited World Cup glory in Qatar.

"I don't think a player like Messi could have performed at his age in a World Cup if he'd played the whole season and come in the summer. He played magnificently, he won the best player, which I think we all agree he was."

Sheikh Salman also had words of praise for Qatar, the city-sized country that delivered a spectacular World Cup without any hiccups.

"I don't think Qatar even got what they deserved from their success," he said. "I don't think anyone wants to say positive things about how Qataris handled the World Cup, particularly in the West and we've noticed that. But to me, it was the best World Cup I've seen since I've been in football. I've been there, I saw the stadiums, and I saw how even the teams were back in their hotel within an hour after the match."

The World Cup in Qatar was the last edition to be played with 32 teams, with the 2026 edition to see the number of teams increased to 48 teams. There has been growing talk to increase the number of teams to 64 for the 2030 edition — to be hosted in Spain, Portugal and Morocco with some matches in South America as well — and beyond.

In April this year, Saudi Arabia's sports minister Prince Abdelaziz Turki bin Faisal said his country would be "more than happy" to hold an even more expanded World Cup but Sheikh Salman believes it is too early to decide with no guarantee of even the 48-team event being a success.

ISLAMABAD: Asian Football Confederation president Sheikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa (C) speaks with chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan (L) during a meeting on Thursday.—Tanveer Shahzad/White Star

"I'm not against 64 teams," he said. "But what I'm against is changing the regulations because you've already decided [48 teams] in the Congress and the [hosting] bids that were submitted for 2026, 2030 and 2034 and were approved on their own form, which is the 48 teams … There are obligations on the host countries to do what needs to be done.

"There are costs, there are stadiums, training facilities, all these things are involved. And when it is approved, you cannot keep changing them. You can talk beyond [the] 2034 [edition] if you want to take [the number of teams] to 64 or you want to come down to 32, that's a different story.

"But we haven't tried the 48 teams yet. The first event is going to be next year so we need to assess that a 48-team World Cup is good or bad and then we can decide whether to go higher or stay as we are or even go lower. It depends on whatever is best for FIFA and the 211 members."

The push to go on the higher side remains unrelenting though, with the promise of more teams and wider interest. But further expansion brings other issues as well, most notably the countries that are able to host it. With the World Cup set to come back to Asia just 12 years after Qatar, Sheikh Salman believes the continent could well become the location of choice for the football showpiece.

"I think Asia is probably the second continent that can host the World Cups in the future," he said. "We know Europe has the infrastructure but with the expansion of the World Cup, it's not so easy for countries to host this event with the cost and the infrastructure that is needed. We've already seen what Qatar has done in 2022. I think it will be difficult to repeat that success with 32 teams. Maybe in the future, it will be back to 32 teams again, but we don't know about it."

Note: This is the second and final part of a wide-ranging interview with the AFC president. The first part was published on Thursday and can be accessed on Dawn.com.

PAKISTAN batter Mohammad Rizwan is clean bowled by South African pacer Nandre Burger during the second One-day International at the Iqbal Stadium on Thursday.—AFP

De Kock smashes ton as South Africa level ODI series

Dawn Report

FAISALABAD: Quinton de Kock's masterful unbeaten 123 powered South Africa to a comprehensive eight-wicket victory over Pakistan in the second One-day International at Iqbal Stadium on Thursday, levelling the three-match series 1-1 with a chase completed in just 40.1 overs.

Chasing 270, South Africa openers Lhuan-dre Pretorius and de Kock made a confident start, adding 81 in 11.5 overs. Pretorius, dropped by Mohammad Nawaz at deep square, raced to 46 off 40 balls with seven fours and a six before edging Mohammad Wasim to Rizwan. De Kock reached his fifty off 55 balls and accelerated seamlessly.

De Kock anchored with poise and power for his 22nd ODI century, and Tony de Zorzi, whose aggressive 76 off 63 balls formed a match-winning 153-run partnership for the second wicket with the former after Pretorius had set the tone with 46.

De Zorzi shifted gears immediately upon arrival, smashing two sixes off Nawaz in the 23rd over. He fell in the 35th over after hitting nine fours and three sixes — chipping a leading edge to point off Faheem Ashraf.

De Kock brought up his hundred off 99 balls with a flick to midwicket, punishing loose deliveries with sixes off Faheem and Shaheen.

With captain Matthew Breetzke in support, he sealed the chase in the 41st over, guiding spinner Saim Ayub to backward point for the winning single —South Africa's joint-biggest win over Pakistan in Pakistan by wickets.

Earlier, Pakistan, electing to bat first under clear skies, staged a remarkable lower-order recovery to post 269 for 9 after a top-order collapse triggered by pacer Nandre Burger threatened to derail their innings.

Standout performances came from Saim, who anchored the early recovery with a composed 53, and Salman Ali Agha, whose patient 69 formed the backbone of the middle order before Nawaz delivered a match-turning 59, blending responsibility with aggression, while Faheem's brisk 28 injected crucial momentum in the death overs.

The hosts suffered an early jolt when opener Fakhar Zaman gloved a sharp Burger bouncer to wicket-keeper de Kock for a three-ball duck. Babar Azam fell for 11, edging Burger to first slip, and Mohammad Rizwan lasted just four balls before being bowled for four. At 22 for 3 in the fifth over, Pakistan were reeling.

Saim and Salman steadied the ship with a 92-run stand for the fourth wicket. Saim played with composure for his 53 off 66 balls, including five fours and a six, before getting caught and bowled by pacer Corbin Bosch.

Salman anchored meanwhile, finding five boundaries before being yorked by Bosch in the 41st over.

Hussain Talat's brief 10 ended caught off Nqabayomzi Peter's leg-spin, leaving Pakistan at 131 for 5. Nawaz then turned the tide with a belligerent 59 off 59 balls — three fours and four sixes — lifting the scoring rate against the spinners. Faheem chipped in with two sixes and as many fours, before falling to Burger.

The tail added 90 runs in the last 10 overs, with Nawaz's late assault. Burger was the pick of the bowlers with 4-46, while Bosch took 2-58 and Peter 3-55.

The series decider will be played at the same venue on Saturday.

Scoreboard

PAKISTAN:
Fakhar Zaman c de Kock b Burger 0
Saim Ayub c&b Bosch 53
Babar Azam c Ferreira b Burger 11
Mohammad Rizwan b Burger.....4
Salman Ali Agha b Bosch 69
Hussain Talat c&b Peter 10
Mohammad Nawaz c&b Peter 59
Faheem Ashraf c Pretorius b Burger.....28
Shaheen Shah Afridi c&b Peter 1
Mohammad Wasim not out.....12
Naseem Shah not out.....6
EXTRAS (B-1, LB-3, NB-1, W-11) 16
TOTAL (for nine wickets, 50 overs) ... 269
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-1 (Fakhar), 2-17 (Babar), 3-22 (Rizwan), 4-114 (Saim), 5-131 (Hussain), 6-190 (Salman), 7-233 (Faheem), 8-234 (Shaheen), 9-263 (Nawaz)
BOWLING: Burger 10-0-46-4 (3w, 1nb), Bosch 10-1-58-2 (1w), Fortuin 10-0-46-0, Ferreira 10-0-41-0 (2w), Linde 2-0-19-0, Peter 8-0-55-3 (2w)
SOUTH AFRICA:
L.D. Pretorius c Rizwan b Wasim 46
Q. de Kock not out 123
T. de Zorzi c Saim b Faheem.....76
M. Breetzke not out.....17
EXTRAS (LB-3, NB-2, W-3).....8
TOTAL (for two wickets, 40.1 overs)...270
DID NOT BAT: S. Qeshile, D. Ferreira, G. Linde, C. Bosch, B. Fortuin, N. Burger, N. Peter
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-81 (Pretorius), 2-234 (de Zorzi)
BOWLING: Shaheen 7-0-41-0, Naseem 6-0-34-0 (1w, 1nb), Saim 3.1-0-22-0, Wasim 8-0-48-1 (1w), Salman 3-0-24-0, Faheem 6-0-40-1 (1w, 1nb), Nawaz 4-0-37-0, Talat 3-0-21-0
RESULT: South Africa won by eight wickets.
PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Quinton de Kock

Cummins targets return in second Ashes Test

SYDNEY: Australia captain Pat Cummins is back bowling multiple overs on a reduced run-up and has targeted returning to the team for the second Ashes Test against England, a day-nighter in Brisbane starting on Dec 4.

The fast bowler has been sidelined by a lower-back issue since July and has already been ruled out of the series opener in Perth, where he will be replaced as skipper by Steve Smith.

Scott Boland is expected to step in for the 32-year-old in the pace attack in Perth but Cummins said he was on track to pick up the pink ball at the Gabba a week later.

"That's the aim and we're building our plan to the second test," Cummins told reporters in Sydney on Thursday.

"It's probably not until you get a bit closer that you can really know where you're at. The good thing is that I'm pulling up well and the body is great.

"We're trying to keep that second test as a live option. I'll have a really good bowl in Perth, and by then I'll know where I'm at."

Cummins, who has been ever-present in the Australia side for Ashes clashes since playing his first Test against England in the 2017-18 series, said there was still uncertainty about how much of a role he would be able to play over the series.

"I don't really want to commit to anything this far out. I'm pretty keen to play as much as I can," Cummins said.

"But realistically, if we have a big game and bowl 40 or 50 overs and then there's a game that starts a few days later, it might be a bridge too far.

"I'm trying to get right, and if I get right then hopefully I'll try to play most of it as I can."

There is a four-day gap between the conclusion of the third Test in Adelaide and the fourth in Melbourne with another four-day break before the fifth and final test in Sydney.

Australia named their squad for the first Test on Wednesday with Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Boland, Sean Abbott and Brendan Doggett the fast-bowling options.—Reuters

Chapman blitz leads Black Caps to tight T20 victory over West Indies

AUCKLAND: Powerful batting by Black Cap Mark Chapman carried New Zealand to a three-run victory in the second T20 against West Indies in Auckland on Thursday night.

Chapman blitzed 78 from just 28 balls as New Zealand made 207-5 batting first at Eden Park, but brilliant power hitting from Romario Shepherd, Rovman Powell and Matthew Forde almost brought West Indies home.

Forde needed a boundary from the final ball to secure at least a tie, but could only manage a single.

The five-match series is level at 1-1.

Scoreboard

NEW ZEALAND:
T. Robinson b Shepherd 39
D. Conway b Forde.....16
R. Ravindra c Hope b Chase.....11
M. Chapman c&b Holder 78
D. Mitchell not out 28
M. Bracewell c Forde b Chase.....5
M. Santner not out 18
EXTRAS (LB-1, W-11).....12
TOTAL (for five wickets, 20 overs).... 207
DID NOT BAT: Z. Foulkes, K. Jamieson, I. Sodhi, J. Duffy
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-55 (Conway), 2-59 (Robinson), 3-107 (Ravindra), 4-164 (Chapman), 5-169 (Bracewell)
BOWLING: Seales 4-0-61-0 (1w), Forde 4-0-17-1 (1w), Holder 4-0-34-1 (1w), Shepherd 3-0-38-1 (2w), Chase 4-0-33-2 (2w), Akeal 1-0-23-0 (3w)
WEST INDIES:
B. King c Conway b Duffy 0
A. Athanaze c Duffy b Sodhi..... 33
S. Hope b Santner 24
A. Auguste c Chapman b Sodhi 7
J. Holder b Sodhi 16
R. Powell c Chapman b Jamieson 45
R. Chase c Chapman b Santner 6
R. Shepherd c Bracewell b Santner.... 34
M. Forde not out..... 29
A. Hosein not out 1
EXTRAS (B-4, NB-1, W-4) 9
TOTAL (for eight wickets, 20 overs) ...204
DID NOT BAT: J. Seales
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-0 (King), 2-49 (Athanaze), 3-68 (Auguste), 4-74 (Hope), 5-86 (Holder), 6-93 (Chase), 7-155 (Shepherd), 8-202 (Powell)
BOWLING: Duffy 4-1-21-1, Jamieson 4-0-51-1 (1nb), Foulkes 2-0-36-0 (2w), Bracewell 2-0-22-0 (1w), Sodhi 4-0-39-3, Santner 4-0-31-3 (1w)
RESULT: New Zealand won by three runs.
PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Mark Chapman

West Indies captain Shai Hope won the toss and chose to field on the same pitch that tested the batters in Wednesday's first match.

The pitch played much the same for the majority of New Zealand's innings as they struggled to 81-2 after 12 overs.

Chapman was 12 from nine balls at the time, struggling for timing on a pitch that was two-paced and tricky when bowlers pitched short.

But then the timing fell into place and Chapman scored 66 runs from his next 19 balls.

He blasted seven sixes and six fours, with three of the next four overs hit for more than 20 runs.

West Indies conceded 126 runs from the last eight overs of the innings, Daryl Mitchell making 28 from 14 and captain Mitchell Santner 18 from 8.

Jacob Duffy then struck in the first over of the West Indies' innings, removing Brandon King for a three-ball duck.

Ish Sodhi, back in the New Zealand side in place of James Neesham, took two wickets in his first two overs, leaving West Indies on 71-3 at the halfway stage.

Powell and Shepherd then put the visitors back on track, Shepherd hammering 34 from 16 balls and Powell blasting 45 from the same number of deliveries. Forde also belted 29 from 13 balls in the closing overs.

Sodhi ended with 3-39 and Santner took 3-31.

The third game of the five-match series is in Nelson on Sunday.—AFP

NEW ZEALAND batter Mark Chapman in action during the second T20 International against West Indies at the Eden Park on Thursday.—AFP

India thump Australia to take 2-1 lead in T20 series

GOLD COAST: India took a 2-1 lead in their T20 series against Australia with a 48-run demolition of the home side on Queensland's Gold Coast on Thursday.

After losing the toss and being sent in to bat, India reached 167-8 thanks to a well-made 46 from Shubman Gill and useful contributions from Abhishek Sharma (28) and Shivam Dube (22).

India's bowlers then took centre stage, bundling Australia out for 119, with off-spinner Washington Sundar taking 3-3 in just eight balls to finish off the match.

"I thought 167 was par on that wicket," Australian captain Mitchell Marsh said.

"But batting was pretty hard — we had a few partnerships but we just couldn't get the big one that would give us momentum going into the back end of the innings."

India would have gone into the innings break hoping for a bigger score than 167 but the total proved too much for the Australians, who started brightly but fell away alarmingly after reaching 67-1 in the ninth over.

INDIAN captain Shubman Gill plays a shot during the fourth T20 International against Australia at the Carrara Stadium on Thursday.—AFP

The visitors will now head to Brisbane on Sunday hoping to clinch the five-match series after the opening game in Canberra was washed out.

"I think the bowlers did really well," India captain Suryakumar Yadav said. "There was a little bit of dew but they adapted really quickly.

"I think the combination (of our bowlers) suits us really well and bowling a side out is what we want from them," he said.

India had looked like reaching an imposing score when openers Abhishek and Gill took to the Australian attack in the early overs.

The pair put on 56 off just 6.4 overs with little trouble before Abhishek, who had smashed a huge six off leg-spinner Adam Zampa two balls earlier, tried a second time only to be caught by Tim David on the long-on boundary.

Dube joined Gill and continued to score freely against Zampa, but he found the pace bowling harder to handle and was bowled by Nathan Ellis to leave India 88-2.

Ellis claimed his second when he bowled Gill with India 121-3.

Any chance of a really big score disappeared four runs later when Yadav was caught on the boundary for 20 and the rest of the batting fell away.

Australian openers Marsh (30) and Matthew Short (25) made a bright start but India's bowlers kept chipping away, snaring wickets at key moments to take control.—AFP

Scoreboard

INDIA:
A. Sharma c David b Zampa.....28
S. Gill b Ellis 46
S. Dube b Ellis.....22
S. Yadav c David b Bartlett 20
T. Varma c Inglis b Zampa 5
J. Sharma lbw b Zampa 3
W. Sundar c (sub) b Ellis.....12
A. Patel not out.....21
A. Singh c Philippe b Stoinis.....0
V. Chakravarthy not out.....1
EXTRAS (LB-3, W-6) 9
TOTAL (for eight wickets, 20 overs)..... 167
DID NOT BAT: J. Bumrah
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-56 (A. Sharma), 2-88 (Dube), 3-121 (Gill), 4-125 (Yadav), 5-131 (Varma), 6-136 (J. Sharma), 7-152 (Sundar), 8-164 (Singh)
BOWLING: Dwarshuis 4-0-31-0, Bartlett 4-0-26-1, Ellis 4-0-21-3 (2w), Stoinis 4-0-41-1 (2w), Zampa 4-0-45-3 (2w)
AUSTRALIA:
M. Marsh c Singh b Dube.....30
M. Short lbw b Patel.....25
J. Inglis b Patel.....12
T. David c Yadav b Dube.....14
J. Philippe c Varun b Singh.....10
M. Stoinis lbw b Sundar.....17
G. Maxwell b Varun 2
B. Dwarshuis b Bumrah 5
X. Bartlett c&b Sunda r0
N. Ellis not out 2
A. Zampa c Gill b Sundar.....0
EXTRAS (LB-1, W-1).....2
TOTAL (all out, 18.2 overs) 119
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-37 (Short), 2-67 (Inglis), 3-70 (Marsh), 4-91 (David), 5-98 (Philippe), 6-103 (Maxwell), 7-116 (Stoinis), 8-116 (Bartlett), 9-118 (Dwarshuis)
BOWLING: Singh 3-0-22-1, Bumrah 4-0-27-1, Varun 4-0-26-1, Axar 4-0-20-2, Dube 2-0-20-2 (1w), Sundar 1.2-0-3-3
RESULT: India won by 48 runs.
PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Axar Patel